



COURTESY: OSU PHOTO ARCHIVES

NATIONAL CHAMPIONS — Members of Ohio State's 1968 national championship football team are (front row, left to right): J. Roman, Roush, Bombach, Ehrsam, Muhlbach, Stier, Worden, N.Roman, Mayes, Foley, Stottlemeyer, Long, Bob Smith, Stowe, Bender, Sobolewski. Second row: Head Coach Hayes, Aston, Butch Smith, Polaski, Jack, Whitfield, Schmidlin, Hutchison, Provost, Urbanik, Nielsen, Huff, Otis, Burton, Brungard, Rusnak. Third row: Jankowski, Hackett, Gentile, Gillian, Radtke, Crapser, Backhus, Hart, Pollitt, White, Hayden, Jurz, Greene, Trapuzzano. Fourth row: Stillwagon, Sensibaugh, Zelina, Qualls, Kern, Conroy, Cheney, Aldren, Donovan, Kuhn, Oppermann, Troha, King, Brockington, Ecrement. Fifth row: Page, Dale, Suber, Bruce Smith, Holloway, Anderson, Waugh, Maciejowski, Lapuh, Hausman, Marsh, Debevc, Coburn, Johnston. Sixth row: Wells, Tatum, Strickland, Adams, Wagner, assistant coaches Hindman, Mallory, Sarkkinen, McCullough, Bruce, Champ, Holtz, Hubbard, Ellison.

Did OSU Have To Win National Title Twice?

By **PAUL HORNING**
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Leave it to Woody!
Elated Tournament of Roses sponsors, the universal media and the loosely defined "football world" billed the Jan. 1, 1969, Rose Bowl as the "true national championship" playoff.
Unbeaten Big Ten champion Ohio State, number one in both major polls — *The Associated Press* and *United Press International* — against unbeaten (though tied) Southern California, number two in both rankings, the first head-to-head pairing of undefeated ones and twos in 22 years.
But the irrepressible Hayes shook up one of his nightly press conferences in Pasadena by obviating the "title match"

aspect.
"We won the national championship a month ago on the basis of the regular season," announced the Buckeye boss, once again providing juicy grist for the West Coast press. "We don't have to win it again. That's double jeopardy."
It wasn't an idle claim. At that time, *UPI* conducted its final poll after regular-season college games had been completed. Its national panel of college coaches picked Ohio State number one in 1968.
Also, shortly after the then-number two Buckeyes demolished number four Michigan 50-14 in a Big Ten championship showdown, the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame had presented Hayes with the MacArthur Bowl, emblematic of its version of the national championship.

Of course, the fast and furious Buckeyes rendered it all academic on Jan. 1. Final balloting by the *AP* poll's sportswriters and sportscasters Jan. 2 was unanimous — college football's undisputed national champion was Ohio State.
At the time, it seemed fitting and proper that the Buckeyes ascended that pinnacle, because the 55th "Grand Daddy of the Bowls" had been designated as a "centennial celebration of the first 100 years of college football." The generally recognized first intercollegiate game was played at New Brunswick, N.J., on Nov. 6, 1869, with Rutgers as a 6-4 winner over Princeton.
Also as of Jan. 1, 1969, it would have seemed inconceivable that 1968 would be the Big Ten's last sweep of the polls until — well, maybe until 1993.

Woody Hayes, dressed in his "work" clothes — T-shirt, slightly baggy slacks, high-top black football shoes, black baseball cap — strolled into the training room on the second floor of Ohio Stadium and poked his head through an open window.
On the southwest practice field, Tiger Ellison's heralded 1967 freshmen had begun an intrasquad scrimmage, the first-team offense against the first-team defense.
Hayes watched for maybe five minutes, then clattered down the stairs and out to the open iron gate behind the south bleachers. After quietly observing for a few minutes, he moved out on the cinder berm that extended from the stadium (used as a starting point for some track events).
Soon, he edged down onto the practice field, well behind the action. Finally, he could stand it no longer. He flipped off his hat, slammed it back on his head, pulled hard on the bill and charged into the offensive huddle, rubbing his hands. Now, he was in charge and relishing every moment of it!
Woody's takeover could be both under- and over-estimated. This was, he said after the scrimmage and often through the year, "the best freshman class in my years (then 18) at Ohio State." He couldn't wait to get them on the varsity (freshmen weren't eligible then), especially since the '67 varsity had started the season with a 2-3 record.
Besides, marshalling backfield talent such as Rex Kern, Ron Maciejowski, John Brockington, Jack Tatum, Leo Hayden and Larry Zelina, plus ends Jan White and Bruce Jankowski, against a defense led by Jim Stillwagon, Doug Adams, Mike Sensibaugh and Tim Anderson would have excited any football coach.
Tatum, incidentally, was the freshman fullback and arguably the toughest of the runners, certainly in the Hayes system. But he said he preferred "to hit rather than get hit."
With underclassmen Jim Otis and Paul Huff established as varsity fullbacks, and Brockington a high-potential player at either left half or

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Hayes watched for maybe five minutes, then clattered down the stairs and out to the open iron gate behind the south bleachers. After quietly observing for a few minutes, he moved out on the

fullback, Woody obliged Tatum with a switch to defensive rover back, a combination linebacker and cornerback. Collegiate and pro ball carriers and receivers can attest that it was a stroke-of-genius conversion. And they had the bruises to prove it.

LOU HOLTZ coached only one year at Ohio State, 1968, but he left an impression.

Under his tutoring and urging, the first defensive secondary of one junior, Ted Provost, and three sophomores, Tatum, Anderson and Sensibaugh (with junior Mike Polaski as fifth man), intercepted 25 enemy passes and yielded only 153 completions in 304 challenges (the Buckeyes' potent offense forced most opponents into a catch-up mode through the air).

As an aside, each of the four 1968 starters made All-American before being drafted into the NFL.

Lou had a big voice for a skinny little guy (his own description). He could be heard all over the practice field. He also had a wit that kept the troops loose and made him a quick favorite at the banquet rostrums — and later on TV talk shows.

His most memorable off-the-field contribution enlivened the squad's Rose Bowl Christmas party, for which the Pasadena Tournament Committee booked a magician/mentalizer as the main entertainment.

As the climax to a bewildering act, he had an assistant cover his eyes with huge slabs of raw bread dough and had his head completely wrapped with a black cloth. He then challenged anyone in the audience to a game of tic-tac-toe.

"I'll take him on," shouted Holtz from the back of the room. He swaggered to the stage, chalked an X in the middle of the frame on the blackboard and smirked. The blindfolded magician won in three moves, as the players screamed with laughter and applauded.

"Aw, I just did it for the kids' morale," Lou claimed afterward. They kidded him for days.

Lou's "defeat" probably had less to do with the Buckeyes' brilliant victory Jan. 1 than coaching, talent, desire and a few other ingredients. But it was part of a happy training camp.

THE BUCKEYES embarked on their first road trip of the 1968 season to Illinois.

With 23 sophomores on the traveling squad, Woody felt it necessary to perform his usual indoctrination.

Before the charter plane began its taxi, he called for attention, removed his sport coat, brought the two shoulder points together, smoothed the sleeves against the waist, folded the coat in the middle and placed it carefully in the overhead compartment.

"This," he explained, "is the way we take care of our coats."

Since the players were missing Friday schoolwork on their own campus, Woody asked them to visit a University of Illinois classroom of their own choosing. With a half-dozen of his warriors in tow, he slipped into the back row of a classroom.

The morning's menu turned out to be a lecture on molecular movement, complete with diagrams. Woody took copious notes and, afterward, approached the lecturer.

"I'm visiting from another Big Ten school," he explained. "My name is Woody Hayes."

"I'm pleased to meet you," replied the Illinois professor. "I'm Dr. Woody."

They chatted for 15 minutes. As for his reaction to Dr. Woody's lecture, Buckeye Woody mused, "It made me realize how little I know."

Later, one of the players who also sat in on the lecture, sophomore Jim Stillwagon, recalled thinking of his coach: "This guy is unbelievable."

REX KERN will never forget 1968 — nor does he want to.

A rare All-Ohio high-schooler in football, basketball and baseball, and projected as OSU's number one quarterback, he developed a back problem in spring practice and underwent spinal disk surgery on June 19.

His status for the football season was so uncertain that, as medics rolled Rex into the operating room, Woody assured his parents, "Rex will get his college degree, whether he ever plays a down for Ohio State or not."

But the spunky, redheaded lad from

Lancaster, Ohio, started against SMU in the opener and, by the end of football season, had become one of the most heralded quarterbacks in college football.

During practice for the Rose Bowl, Kern dislocated his left shoulder — a less memorable aspect of that eventful sophomore season, but he was at his usual station when the Buckeyes took the field Jan. 1. So masterful was his performance that writers covering the Rose Bowl voted him offensive player of the game ahead of USC's Heisman-toting O.J. Simpson.

Not long after the Buckeye squad established headquarters at the Huntington Hotel in Pasadena, Rex met Nancy Henno, one of the Rose Bowl princesses — she was! — and thus began an idyllic Rose Bowl romance that culminated in marriage in 1973.

Rex, Nancy and their two sons now live in Ventura, Calif.

To be academically correct, he should be addressed as Dr. Rex Kern. He received his Ph.D in athletic administration from Ohio State in 1983.

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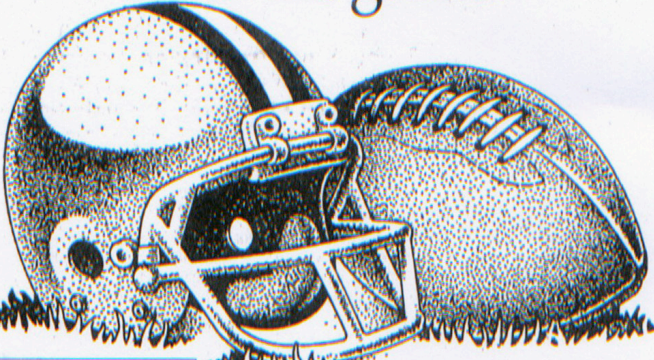
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YOUTH IS SERVED IN SEASON OPENER

By MARK REA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State football fans had a lot of questions as the 1968 season began, but Woody Hayes had all the right answers, guiding his Buckeyes to a convincing 35-14 victory over Southern Methodist University in the opener for both teams.

A crowd of 73,855 was on hand in Ohio Stadium during the warm, late-September afternoon to witness the Buckeyes, laden with experienced veterans and talented sophomores, pull out to a 26-7 lead at halftime.

SMU head coach Hayden Fry tried to generate an offensive attack against the Buckeyes through the air as the Mustangs attempted a stadium-record 76 passes. But the Buckeyes picked off five interceptions and recovered three SMU fumbles to keep the Mustangs at bay throughout much of the contest.

Sophomore quarterback Rex Kern, returning from off-season back surgery, spearheaded the Buckeyes' offense, completing eight of 14 passes for 139 yards and two touchdowns. Kern also rushed for 45 yards and another TD.

Junior fullback Jim Otis was the workhorse for Ohio State, lugging the ball 18 times for 63 yards and a touchdown. But junior fullback David Brungard was OSU's leading rusher in the game, chewing up 101 yards on just 14 carries, an average of 7.2 yards per carry.

Kern played no favorites when it came to throwing the ball. Otis, Brungard and sophomore halfback John Brockington caught two passes apiece coming out of the backfield. Both of Brungard's receptions went for touchdowns.

For Southern Methodist, quarterback Chuck Hixson's arm needed a good rest after his performance against the Buckeyes. He attempted 69 passes and completed 37 of them for 417 yards. All three figures represent SMU records.

Split end Jerry Levias was on the receiving end of 15 of Hixson's passes, piling up 160 yards. Ken Fleming caught nine more for 104 yards and SMU's only two touchdowns in the game.

The Mustangs outgained Ohio State 487-372, but Southern Methodist self-destructed with its eight turnovers, six of them occurring inside Ohio State's 20-yard line. As a result, SMU could push the ball into the end zone on only two occasions.



I GUESS WE'LL THROW — Southern Methodist head coach Hayden Fry (left) and quarterback Chuck Hixson confer on the sideline during the 1968 season opener against Ohio State. The two probably decided on a pass play. The Mustangs threw a then-NCAA record 76 passes in the game, but it wasn't nearly enough as the Buckeyes rolled to a 35-14 win.

The game began with SMU taking the opening kickoff and driving it down the field. After a pair of rushing plays, Hixson went to the air, gaining seven yards on a screen pass to halfback Mike Richardson and then breaking into Buckeye territory with an 18-yard strike to split end Fleming.

Another 18-yard gain, this time on a Hixson pass to Levias, put the Mustangs at the OSU 28-yard line. But on a third-and-10 play, sophomore safety man Mike Sensibaugh intercepted a pass on the nine to thwart the scoring threat.

Ohio State mustered no offense on its

first series and punted the ball away. Hixson immediately went back to work, finding Richardson for a 36-yard pass that took the Mustangs to the OSU 26-yard line. But SMU stalled again and missed another scoring opportunity when a 38-yard field goal try was short and wide right.

The Buckeyes took over at their own 20 but sputtered again. Then, after holding the Mustangs, OSU's offense finally got into gear.

Kern connected on a 10-yard pass to Otis to get the drive started and then hit Brockington on a 44-yard catch and run to the SMU 27-yard line. Brungard

and Otis took over, softening up the middle of the Mustangs' defense, before Kern sneaked over from the two for the game's first score. Place-kicker Dick Merryman's PAT was good to give OSU a 7-0 lead with 3:22 remaining in the first quarter.

On the ensuing kickoff, SMU coughed up the football and the Buckeyes swarmed on it at the Mustangs' 28-yard line.

Staying with the running attack, Ohio State marched 28 yards in seven plays topped off by Otis' eight-yard scamper through left tackle. Merryman's kick was good again and suddenly OSU had taken a 14-0 lead.

Determined to stay in the game, SMU put together an excellent drive made up almost exclusively of passing plays. Hixson threaded his way through the Buckeyes' defense, completing five consecutive passes, the last one to Fleming for the TD and a 14-7 score at the 13:17 mark of the second period.

The complexion of the game changed when Fry ordered an onside kick. The attempt failed when Buckeye junior offensive guard Alan Jack recovered the ball at the OSU 46-yard line and Ohio State turned it into a quick touchdown less than one minute later.

Brockington went over right guard for four yards and Kern gained nine more on a keeper to move the ball to the SMU 41. Then Brungard was stuffed at the line of scrimmage but bounced off and got loose outside, scampering 41

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yards down the sideline for a touch-down. Merryman's conversion was blocked, but the Buckeyes had mounted a 20-7 advantage.

Hixson tried to rally SMU in the second quarter, but two drives ended with Tim Anderson and Mark Stier interceptions for OSU and a third died with another missed 38-yard field goal attempt.

The Buckeyes weren't through in the first half, though, as they put together a 17-play drive which covered 82 yards and ate up most of the rest of the second period.

It was traditional Woody Hayes-coached football with Kern, Brungard and Otis keeping the ball on the ground and getting chunks of six or seven yards each time. Then, just when SMU thought it had the run properly defended, Kern stood up and threw an 18-yard strike to an uncovered Brungard in the end zone. Merryman's kick sailed wide to the right, but OSU still held a commanding halftime lead of 26-7.

Southern Methodist began the second half threatening to make a game of it. On their first possession, the Mustangs got to the OSU 19-yard line before junior defensive back Mike Polaski recovered a Fleming fumble. Then SMU got to the Ohio State two-yard line before Stier made his second interception off Hixson.

The third time proved to be the charm in the quarter as SMU capitalized on a Buckeye mistake. Otis fumbled the ball away near midfield and Hixson took over from there. He

guided the Mustangs 51 yards on seven plays, the last six yards on a pass to Fleming in the left corner of the end zone, cutting OSU's lead to 26-14 with just 21 seconds remaining in the third quarter.

The Mustangs missed a golden opportunity to tighten things even more. On its first possession of the fourth quarter, Hixson drove the team to the Ohio State 18-yard line, but the drive stalled when co-captain Dirk Worden knocked away a pass meant for Levias at the two. That occurred on a fourth-and-eight play.

The Buckeyes got out of the hole and let the defense take over, registering a pair of sacks. The second one came when sophomore defensive end Mark Debevc tackled Hixson in the end zone for a safety at the 7:55 mark of the fourth quarter.

After SMU's free kick, the Buckeyes took just four more plays to strike pay dirt again. The big plays in the drive were a 23-yard pass from Kern to fellow sophomore Richard Kuhn and a 20-yard strike from the Buckeye quarterback to Brungard. Merryman's placement was good, giving OSU a commanding 35-14 lead.

Hixson tried to rally SMU one last time but was intercepted by sophomore linebacker Doug Adams on the team's next-to-last possession and then, after an afternoon of pounding absorbed from the Ohio State defense, was finally knocked out of the ball game in the final two minutes.

BUCKEYES 35, MUSTANGS 14

SOUTHERN METHODIST	0	7	7	0	14
OHIO STATE	14	12	0	9	35

- OSU — Kern, 2 run (Merryman kick) 3:22
- OSU — Otis, 8 run (Merryman kick) 0:46
- SMU — Fleming, 8 pass from Hixson (Lesser kick) 13:17
- OSU — Brungard, 41 run (kick blocked) 12:29
- OSU — Brungard, 18 pass from Kern (kick failed) 0:35
- SMU — Fleming, 6 pass from Hixson (Lesser kick) 0:21
- OSU — Safety, Hixson tackled in end zone by Debevc 7:55
- OSU — Brungard, 20 pass from Kern (Merryman kick) 6:45
- Att. — 73,855

	SMU	OSU
First Downs	27	18
Rushing	5	13
Passing	21	5
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	22-50	63-227
Passing Yards	437	145
Passes	76-40-5	17-9-0
Plays	98	80
Total Net Yards	487	372
Third Down Efficiency	8-20	9-21
Punts	3-41.5	11-36.5
Fumbles-Lost	4-3	3-1
Penalties	5-51	7-61

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) — SMU: Richardson 11-62; Livingston 1-5; Lesser 1-3; Levias 2-2; Clements 1-2; Hixson 6(-34). OSU: Brungard 14-101; Otis 18-63; Kern 18-45; Gillian 2-24; Hayden 2-6; Long 1-1; Greene 1(-1); Maciejowski 1(-3); Huff 2(-4); Brockington 4(-5).

PASSING (Att.-Comp.-Int.-Yds.-TD) — SMU: Hixson 69-37-5-417-2; Carter 7-3-0-20-0. OSU: Kern 14-8-0-139-2; Long 3-1-0-6-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) — SMU: Levias 15-160; Fleming 9-104; Richardson 5-61; Holden 4-55; Clements 3-32; Jordan 2-10; Stringer 1-11; Floyd 1-4. OSU: Brockington 2-54; Brungard 2-38; Otis 2-16; Kuhn 1-23; Jankowski 1-8; White 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) — SMU: Doggett 1-40.0; Echols 2-43.0. OSU: Sensibaugh 11-36.5.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.-Lg.) — SMU: None. OSU: None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.-Lg.) — SMU: None. OSU: None.

DEFENSIVE FUMBLES RECOVERED BY — SMU: Gordon. OSU: Suber, Polaski, Hutchison.

INTERCEPTIONS — SMU: None. OSU: Sensibaugh, Anderson, Stier (2), Adams.

Players In The Game

SOUTHERN METHODIST — Levias, Mitchell, Blaine, Holden, Jackson, Higgins, Wright, McMillan, Cupples, Crenshaw, Cormier, Portillo, Armstrong, Poulos, Hart, Brittain, Moore, White, May, Knee, Johnston, O'Connell, Fleming, J.Jordan, McGinnis, Fraser, White, Hixson, Carter, M.Richardson, Lesser, M.Jordan, Tunnell, Doggett, Gordon, T.Richardson, Stringer, Haynes, Nekuz, Livingston, Floyd, D.Smith, Clements, Floyd, Echols.

OHIO STATE — White, Kuhn, Whitfield, Ecrement, Foley, Schmidlin, Urbanik, Hart, Backhus, Cheney, Muhlbach, Stillwagon, J.Roman, Jack, Suber, Tatum, Strickland, Donovan, Mayes, Hutchison, Nielsen, Holloway, Troha, Jankowski, Debevc, Sobolewski, Kern, Long, Merryman, Maciejowski, Brungard, Hayden, Provost, Greene, Radtke, Adams, Gillian, Burton, Gentile, Brockington, Polaski, Anderson, Zelina, Otis, Sensibaugh, Huff, Ehrsam.

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